

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 12
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Russian forces secured limited advances east of Kyiv and north from Crimea on March 12 but continue to face logistical challenges, mounting casualties, and sustained Ukrainian counterattacks. Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv in the past 24 hours. Russian forces made limited advances around Chernihiv and toward Kyiv's eastern outskirts after pausing for several days. Continued Ukrainian counterattacks and successful operations by Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces continue to threaten Russia's long line of communication in northeastern Ukraine. Russian forces captured unspecified "eastern outskirts" of Mariupol on March 12 and continue to shell the city in a likely effort to force it to capitulate.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv for the second day in a row.**
- **Russian forces resumed limited attacks toward northeastern Kyiv and renewed efforts to fully encircle Chernihiv.**
- **Ongoing Ukrainian counterattacks in northeastern Ukraine are likely forcing Russia to redeploy forces away from offensive operations toward Kyiv to consolidate its long line of communication.**
- **Russian forces made limited territorial gains in eastern Mariupol and continued to shell the city.**
- **The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces conducted a new advance northeast from Kherson along the western bank of the Dnipro.**
- **The Ukrainian military claimed to have damaged or destroyed 31 Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) as of March 11.**
- **The Kremlin likely seeks to deter continuing Western military aid shipments to Ukraine, threatening that Russia will view Western military aid shipments to Ukraine as legitimate military targets on March 12.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 12, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

The Ukrainian military claimed to have damaged or destroyed 31 Russian BTGs as of March 11, its first numbered claim of damage to Russian forces of the war. Ukrainian military intelligence reported at 6:00 am local time on March 12 that Ukrainian forces have destroyed 13 Russian BTGs and rendered 18 BTGs combat ineffective as of March 11.¹ US intelligence estimated Russia deployed approximately 120 BTGs to Ukraine’s borders prior to February 24.² The Ukrainian military has not previously made any official statements on numbers of destroyed Russian BTGs. The Ukrainian General Staff continues to report widespread Russian logistics and morale issues, stating on March 12 that Russia “was forced to change tactics” due to unsuccessful attempts to conduct an offensive, that Russian units continue to abandon equipment, and that the rate of Russian desertions and surrenders to Ukrainian forces is increasing.³ The General Staff additionally stated that Russia is calling up conscripts from the DNR and LNR, mercenaries from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Russian convicted prisoners to offset heavy combat losses and reserve problems.⁴ The Ukrainian Directorate of Intelligence (GUR) reported on March 12 that Russian commanders authorized their soldiers to loot civilian businesses and households and move to “self sufficiency” to offset continued supply problems.⁵

Ukraine updated its previous report that Russian aircraft bombed the Belarusian town of Kopani on March 11 in a likely false-flag attack, adding that Russian aircraft also bombed Buhlich and Verkhny Terebezh.⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian and Belarusian forces have not conducted any military operations toward western Ukraine but that Minsk is “taking measures to strengthen the protection of the border with Ukraine” and Ukraine cannot rule out Belarus entering the war.⁷

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov claimed that Russia will view Western military aid shipments to Ukraine as legitimate military targets on March 12.⁸ Ryabkov claimed Russia previously warned the United States that “pumping Ukraine with weapons” is dangerous and makes the arms shipments military targets. Ryabkov reiterated Kremlin claims that the United States provoked the war in Ukraine by supplying Ukraine with weapons. The Kremlin likely seeks to deter continuing Western military aid to Ukraine by threatening to target arms shipments, though Russian forces have so far conducted relatively few air and missile strikes in western Ukraine to date and would likely face strong Ukrainian air defenses.

Russian forces are engaged in four primary efforts at this time:

- Main effort—Kyiv (comprised of three subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv;
 - Supporting effort 1a—Luhansk Oblast;
- Supporting effort 2—Mariupol and Donetsk Oblast; and
- Supporting effort 3—Kherson and advances westward.

Main effort—Kyiv axis: Russian operations on the Kyiv axis are aimed at encircling the city from the northwest, west, and east.

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv in the past 24 hours. Russian forces made limited advances around Chernihiv and toward Kyiv’s eastern outskirts after pausing for several days. Continued Ukrainian counterattacks and successful operations by Territorial Defense Forces continue to threaten Russia’s long line of communication in northeastern Ukraine.

Subordinate main effort along the west bank of the Dnipro

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv for the second day in a row.⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces continued to regroup and replenish reserves. Russian forces continue to shell Kyiv's northwestern suburbs but did not launch any ground attacks on March 11-12.¹⁰ Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian loitering munitions-equipped unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over downtown Kyiv on March 12, the first Russian use of armed UAVs in Ukraine that ISW has observed.¹¹ Russian forces are likely deploying new assets to the western Kyiv front as part of ongoing resupply and replenishment efforts.

Subordinate supporting effort—Chernihiv axis

Russian forces resumed limited attacks toward northeastern Kyiv on March 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces attacked toward Zazymya (northwest of Brovary) and Vyshenky with unspecified “partial success.”¹² Russian forces attacked toward Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske and Shestovytsia, roughly 15km west and southwest of Chernihiv, in a likely effort to fully encircle the city.¹³ The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported the deployment of Russian bridging equipment in Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske, Levkovychi, Zhukotka, and Hrodnya, around Chernihiv.¹⁴ Russian forces may be preparing for an operation to cross the Desna River from west to east to further surround Chernihiv.

Subordinate supporting effort—Sumy axis

Russian forces continued to reinforce the Sumy axis on March 12 and did not launch new ground offensives.¹⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported at midnight local time on March 11 that Russian forces are shifting reserves in Velyka Pysarivka, Moskovsky Bobryak, and Lebedyn – several towns along Russia's exposed ground line of communication in northeastern Ukraine.¹⁶ Ukrainian territorial defense forces additionally conducted at least two successful attacks near Sumy on March 11, destroying and capturing several Russian tanks and artillery vehicles.¹⁷ ISW previously assessed that continuing Ukrainian counterattacks in northeastern Ukraine would force Russia to redeploy forces to consolidate this long line of communication.¹⁸

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv:

Russian forces captured unspecified northern portions of Izyum, 110km southeast of Kharkiv, on March 12.¹⁹ Russian forces additionally launched an unsuccessful attack on Rubizhne, south of Kharkiv.²⁰ Russian forces continued to shell Kharkiv but did not conduct any major ground attacks on March 12.²¹ Russian forces likely seek to bypass Kharkiv from the southeast and advance toward Dnipro and Zaporizhya, but are unlikely to make substantial advances without committing further combat power.

Supporting Effort #1a—Luhansk Oblast:

The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces concentrated additional reserves in Severodonetsk and Svatove but did not conduct any offensive operations in the past 24 hours.²²

Supporting Effort #2—Mariupol and Donetsk Oblast:

The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed Russian forces captured the “eastern outskirts” of Mariupol on March 12 but did not provide further details.²³ Ukrainian forces reported repelling a Russian offensive toward Krasna Polyana and Olhynka – two towns north of Mariupol which Russian forces previously claimed to have already captured – as of noon local time on March 12.²⁴ Russian forces are unlikely to seize Mariupol through a direct assault without a greater concentration of forces (which they remain unlikely to have the ability to assemble). Russia will likely continue to shell the city and maintain gradual ground assaults to force the city to capitulate.

Supporting Effort #3—Kherson and west:

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted a new advance northeast from Kherson along the western bank of the Dnipro on March 12, deploying artillery and air defense assets to Mylove.²⁵ Russian forces have not yet conducted attacks at strength along the west bank of the Dnipro on the southern axis of advance. Russian forces may intend to advance northeast to encircle Zaporizhya, but are unlikely to have the forces necessary to do so while Russian forces in the south remain committed to the encirclement of Mariupol. Russian forces directly south of Zaporizhya conducted limited advances on March 12, capturing Stepove and Shcherbaky (approximately 40km south of Zaporizhya).²⁶

Russian forces did not conduct any new attacks toward Mykolayiv on March 12 and reinforced their existing positions.²⁷ Russian forces are unlikely to resume major offensive operations toward Odesa in the next 48-72 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- The Kremlin likely seeks to pressure Belarus to join the war in Ukraine and will deploy Syrian fighters to Ukraine in the near future;
- Ukrainian counterattacks and operations by Territorial Defense Forces in northeastern Ukraine threaten Russia's exposed line of communication, requiring Russia to redeploy forces away from the offensive toward eastern Kyiv;
- Russian forces are undertaking another operational pause to prepare for renewed efforts to encircle Kyiv from east and west and/or to seize the city center itself following their failures of March 8-9;
- Russian troops may drive on Zaporizhya City itself within the next 48-72 hours, likely to try and block it on both banks of the Dnipro River and set conditions for subsequent operations after Russian forces take Mariupol, which they are currently besieging.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270528335260252>; <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-ukraina-86-tysyach-rossiyskikh-voyennykh-sokhranyayut-boyesposobnost/31749564.html>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UmFe7I8AEU>.

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/80-russias-forces-around-ukraine-attack-positions-us-official-says-2022-02-23/>.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270958968550522>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270528335260252>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270958968550522>.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270958968550522>.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/269120212066073>.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270958968550522>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.

⁸ <https://tass.ru/politika/14049899>.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/trbrtc/status/1502408517378093061>; <https://twitter.com/muyixiao/status/1502374468894740482>;

<https://twitter.com/ckoettl/status/1502369824994910212>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1502550038731497474>.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3086399571611474>; <https://twitter.com/UAWeapons/status/1502428796317835270>.

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- ¹⁸ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-10>.
- ¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.
- ²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.
- ²¹ <https://twitter.com/Liveuamap/status/1502349563012734980>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1502543799549112324>;
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1502306926268452869>.
- ²² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.
- ²³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.
- ²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270528335260252>.
- ²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270736931906059>.
- ²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>.
- ²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/270374021942350>;